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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [MK](#)
SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: STIFF TIP SENTENCES AND ANOTHER
ANTI-TIP RAID

REF: A. SKOPJE 434

[1](#)B. SKOPJE 579

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) On September 7, a Skopje Court handed down trafficking-in-persons (TIP) sentences of between two and nine years in prison to 18 defendants in the "Operation Danube" trial (ref A) and ordered forfeiture of the defendants' assets involved. Two days later, the police conducted an anti-TIP raid on a bar in western Macedonia, which uncovered eight potential TIP victims. These developments, following the sentencing in the "Redgo" case (ref B), show the commitment of Macedonian executive and judicial officials to tackle human trafficking aggressively. End summary.

SPEEDY TRIAL DELIVERS STIFF TIP SENTENCES TO 18 DEFENDANTS...

[1](#)2. (SBU) On September 7, a Skopje Basic Court handed down sentences to 18 of the original 19 suspected members of an elaborate TIP operation that was uncovered during the regional anti-TIP "Operation Danube." The five-month long "Operation Danube," which ended on May 29, was conducted in eight European countries and territories, using special investigative measures to trace the activities of a well-organized transnational TIP network.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Only two months after the conclusion of "Operation Danube," a speedy two-week trial yielded stiff sentences for the perpetrators on the basis of Criminal Code Art. 418b ("smuggling of migrants") and Art. 418c ("organizing a group for TIP or smuggling"). Three of the four ring-leaders --Naser Shemtunek, Nexhati Ajdari and Goran Stojanovski-- each received 9 years in prison, while the fourth leader --Olivera Todorovska-- was sentenced to 4.5 years imprisonment. The rest of the defendants received between two and 3.5 years in prison. In addition to the prison sentences, the court confiscated 10 vehicles and cell phones that were either used to commit crimes, or were assets generated through criminal activities.

...LATEST POLICE RAID UNCOVERS 8 POTENTIAL TIP VICTIMS

[1](#)4. (SBU) On September 10, the Secretary of the National Commission on Combating TIP and Illegal Migration, Kiro Todorovski, informed us about a September 9 police raid on the "Las Vegas" bar near Tetovo in western Macedonia.

According to Todorovski, the police acted upon information about suspicious TIP and prostitution activities in the bar. The raid uncovered six women from Albania, who were illegally in the country, and two Macedonian women. None of the women had valid work papers. The police are currently conducting initial investigative interviews with the potential TIP victims.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) The speedy prosecution and sentencing of the "Operation Danube" defendants, in addition to the recent sentencing of the "Redgo" defendants, demonstrates that the Macedonian courts finally have taken anti-TIP activism to heart. The confiscation of cell phones and vehicles is another positive sign of the courts' readiness to implement the law as a deterrent for future criminals. Often dubbed "the weakest link" in the fight against TIP in Macedonia, the judicial system now has a chance to redeem itself by upholding the TIP sentences, which the defendants have pledged to appeal.

16. (SBU) The continuous raids on suspicious establishments show sustained anti-TIP commitment on the part of the police, as well. Close cooperation between the police and the local NGO that runs the internal victims shelter has assisted 39 Macedonian TIP victims since April. Post will continue to support assistance to victims and to press for full use of legal authorities against traffickers.

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